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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. GRAVES of Georgia).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 12, 2011.

I hereby appoint the Honorable TOM GRAVES to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2011, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

THE COLOMBIA TRADE AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. This Congress is entering its fifth month without bringing a single jobs bill to the House floor, and there are no jobs bills in sight. But we do hear calls for a series of trade agreements, including ones with Colombia and Korea.

At a time when millions of Americans are still looking for work, the House will be spending time protecting

corporate investments in foreign countries and not jobs here at home. At a time when multinational corporations have fired 2.9 million American workers, they will be hiring 2.4 million workers overseas. The House will be spending time shoring up corporate overseas investments rather than encouraging investments here at home. And at a time when so many in the Middle East are rising up for democracy and human rights and are receiving support from the United States for those efforts, the House is taking up trade agreements with Colombia that fails to live up to those very values.

One of our most important responsibilities as elected officials is to promote and to protect American jobs. We do this by trying to ensure that American workers do not face unfair competition with countries that keep wages low by repressing essential democratic rights. These are important rights, the right to speak out, the right to protest, the right to organize unions, the right to bargain collectively and directly with their employers, and to support political efforts to improve their economic conditions without reprisals.

But reprisals are what you get in China. Thousands of strikes last year were met not by their employers but by the police and the army, beating up on the workers who were seeking better wages and better working conditions in plants all across China.

What do you get when you protest your rights in Colombia? You get assassinations. You get death squads against union members, union leaders, members of union families all across the country. The American worker can compete; but you can't compete against the Colombian Army, the Colombian death squads, the Chinese Army. That's not fair competition. But that's what's protected in these trade agreements.

Tragically, Colombia stands out as a country where wages are kept low and

workers are repressed through widespread violence and other human rights violations. Colombia has earned the reputation as the most dangerous country on Earth for workers trying to build a better life. During the last Colombian President's 8 years in office, 570 union members were assassinated—149 in the last 3 years—and the violence hasn't stopped with the election of the new President.

Reports of assassinations against union members and leaders keep coming. The two most recent ones include the April 8 assassination of Ramiro Sanchez. He was shot repeatedly as he left a union meeting. Mr. Sanchez had received death threats after organizing workers to demand local hiring at an oil company. And the March 30 assassination of Hector Orozco, who was an official with the peasant farmers' union. He and his colleague Gildardo Garcia were found murdered. Days earlier, Mr. Orozco reported that he and other peasants were threatened by an army officer.

On top of the violence is the problem of impunity. Authorities have only investigated a quarter of the union killings since 1986. No one has been held accountable for 98 percent of the crimes against unionists. The violence and impunity came together in another recent case. A few weeks ago, Judge Gloria Gaono was shot in the head in broad daylight. At the time, she was presiding over a politically sensitive case of a military officer accused of murdering three children, one of whom he apparently admitted to raping.

Now Colombia has a new President who says he wants to turn the page on Colombia's past. But these murders and human rights violations are not the past. They are happening today. Before we consider any agreement with Colombia on free trade, real changes must come to Colombia. That is why I

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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